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Report of the Secretary-General

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I. Introduction

1. The report of the Secretary-General entitled "Renewing the United Nations: a programme for reform" (A/51/950) was the result of a thorough review of the activities of the United Nations with the objective of identifying ways in which the United Nations could more effectively and efficiently meet the challenges that lie ahead as we enter the new century and a new millennium. The report noted, however, that reform is not an event but a process, and that although the proposals made are important for the ways in which they would produce a stronger, more resilient and more flexible United Nations in the short term, they are also important for the general direction they would impart for the future evolution of the Organization.

2. An important aspect of the work of the Organization that was addressed by the report was the area of "Environment, habitat and sustainable development". The report reviewed the experience and achievements of the United Nations in this area, and noted that of all the challenges facing the world community in the next century, none will be more formidable or pervasive as the attainment of a sustainable equilibrium between economic growth, poverty reduction, social equity and the protection of the Earth's resources, common and life-support systems. The report also noted that the General Assembly, at its nineteenth special session, had emphasized the difficulties and divisions that continue to impede progress towards agreement on the cooperative measures required to deal with these issues and to ensure enforcement of existing agreements.

3. The report further reviewed developments since the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), including the proliferation of new actors in the field and their expanding participation in United Nations forums; the emergence of the Commission on Sustainable Development as an important policy forum; augmented environmental capacities in United Nations organizations; the transition to a predominantly urban world; and the disappointing response to the needs of developing countries for new and additional resources. The report concluded that this experience demonstrated the need for a more integrated systemic approach to policies and programmes throughout the range of United Nations activities in the economic and social field through mainstreaming the Organization's commitment to sustainable development. This would require closer cooperation and interaction between the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (Habitat), and between both entities and other departments, funds and programmes in the economic, social and development areas.

4. The report reaffirmed the role of UNEP as the environmental voice of the United Nations, and that high priority must be given to according it the status, strength and access to resources it required to function as the environmental agency of the world community, as confirmed by the Nairobi Declaration adopted by the nineteenth session of the UNEP Governing Council. The report emphasized the need to strengthen UNEP's role as the focal point for harmonization and coordination of environment-related activities, and noted that the Secretary-General intended to lend his full support to that process. It was considered timely to take immediate steps to strengthen UNEP and Habitat, while considering the fundamental changes that might be required to clarify and focus their structures and functions within a reformed United Nations and to revitalize political and financial support for them.

5. In order to initiate this process, action 12 of the Report provided that the Secretary-General, in consultation with Governments, the Executive Director of UNEP and the Executive Director of Habitat, would develop new measures for strengthening and restructuring the two organizations, based on General Assembly resolution 2997 (XXVII) and 32/162, and taking into account the decisions and recommendations of the Governing Council of UNEP and the Commission on Human Settlements, and would make recommendations to the General Assembly at its fifty-third session.

II. United Nations Task Force on Environment and Human Settlements

6. In order to initiate the process of preparing recommendations for the fifty-third session of the General Assembly, the Secretary-General established the Task Force on Environment and Human Settlements under the chairmanship of the Executive Director of UNEP. The Task Force was composed of 21 eminent persons, including ministers, senior government officials, senior United Nations officials and non-governmental organizations representatives. Its terms of reference included a review of current structures and arrangements through which environmental activities are carried out within the United Nations to evaluate the efficacy of those arrangements and make recommendations for such changes and improvements required to optimize the work and effectiveness of the

Secretary-General and subsequent submission to the General Assembly.

7. The Task Force met four times, and delivered its report to the Secretary-General on 15 June 1998; the report of the Task Force, including its composition and terms of reference, is contained in the annex.

8. The recommendations of the Task Force report represent the completion of another important step in the overall reform of the United Nations, as well as the beginning of a process designed to equip the United Nations to concretely address the pressing environmental and sustainable development problems currently facing the international community. In making its recommendations, the Task Force proceeded on a commonly shared conviction that the institutional fragmentation and loss of policy coherence as a result of the number of separate environment-related intergovernmental processes had resulted in a loss of effectiveness in the work of the United Nations in the area of environment and human settlements. The Task Force examined the existing organizational arrangements within the United Nations to determine how they might be changed to better meet international environmental and human settlements challenges, and how existing United Nations structures and arrangements could be optimally redesigned to deal with the problems that will concern the international community in the coming decades. The Task Force derived its overall guidance from the conviction of the Secretary-General, as expressed in his 1997 reform report, that the United Nations must take the lead in building a new international system through greater unity of purpose, greater coherence of efforts, and greater agility in responding to an increasingly dynamic and complex world.

9. The main findings of the Task Force are reflected in 24 recommendations contained in seven sections on:

(a) Inter-agency linkages;

(b) Linkages among and support to environmental and environment-related conventions;

(c) UNEP, Habitat and the United Nations Office at Nairobi;

(d) Information, monitoring, assessment and early warning;

(e) Intergovernmental forums;

(f) Involvement of major groups;

(g) Future initiatives.

10. The recommendations are designed to enhance coordinated action by the United Nations and begin the process of improving overall policy coherence, and represent the sum of measures that, in the view of the Task Force, must be taken to revitalize the work of the United Nations in the environment and human settlements in the short term. Similar to the approach of the initial proposals of the Secretary-General on reform, the recommendations require decisions and measures to be taken at different levels, i.e., both at the Secretariat level and at the intergovernmental level. The recommendations are spelled out in detail, together with their underlying rationale, in the report of the Task Force (see annex). However, they are summarized briefly below, clustered according to the level at which the decisions have to be taken.

III. Recommendations for action at the Secretariat level

A. Inter-agency coordination

11. Recommendation 1 of the Task Force relates to improved inter-agency coordination. In response to the perceived need for effective coordination, the Task Force recommended that the Secretary-General establish an environmental management group under the chairmanship of the Executive Director of UNEP. The group would adopt a problem-solving, results oriented approach that would enable United Nations bodies and their partners to share information, consult on proposed new initiatives and contribute to a planning framework and develop agreed priorities and their respective roles in the implementation of those priorities in order to achieve a more rational and cost-effective use of their resources. It would also provide a forum and a mechanism to enhance complementarity between the analytical and normative activities of UNEP with the operational role of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). As such, the group would follow the "issue management" approach outlined by the Secretary-General in his reform report. The group would be supported by Secretariat arrangements that would draw on the existing substantive capacity of UNEP and Habitat. The reports of the group could be made available to relevant intergovernmental bodies to enhance intergovernmental policy coherence. The Task Force recommended that following the conclusion of the current General Assembly session, the Secretary-General consult with members of ACC and decide on the establishment of the group.

B. Linkages among and support to environmental and environment-related conventions

12. A series of actions are recommended under recommendation 2 of the Task Force that have implications both at the secretariat and intergovernmental levels for UNEP, and are consistent with the mandate of UNEP as contained in relevant General Assembly resolutions and UNEP Governing Council decisions.

13. In pursuance of these recommendations, the Executive Director of UNEP would take action to:

(a) Base UNEP support to global and regional conventions on its capacities for information, monitoring and assessment, which should also be strengthened (recommendation 2 (a));

(b) Continue to sponsor joint meetings of heads of convention secretariats to ensure that the work programmes established by conferences of parties to conventions and the substantive support provided by UNEP are complementary, fill gaps and take advantage of synergy (recommendation 2 (b)).

14. The Task Force also recommended that the Secretary-General, through the Executive Director of UNEP, invite Governments and conferences of parties to consider the implications of operational inefficiencies and costs arising from the geographical dispersion of convention secretariats and ways of overcoming this. Further consultations among the relevant United Nations entities will be required to develop the modalities for the implementation of this recommendation, and should result in specific proposals being made to the relevant intergovernmental bodies for their consideration (recommendation 2 (d)).

C. United Nations Environment Programme, United Nations Centre for Human Settlements and United Nations Office at Nairobi

15. The Task Force recognized and emphasized the central importance of stabilizing and strengthening the Nairobi location of the United Nations. In its recommendations 3, 4, 5, 6, 7 and 8, which are intended for action by the Secretary-General and the Executive Director of UNEP and of Habitat, the Task Force has addressed, *inter alia*, security, the strengthening of the United Nations Office at Nairobi, the exploitation of the synergy deriving from the co-location of UNEP and Habitat, and the development of a financial strategy.

16. Although several of these measures can be implemented immediately, others will require further consultation with Governments or the presentation of further proposals to intergovernmental bodies. Action that can be taken immediately invoives the implementation of recommendations 3, 4, 5 and 6. In this regard, the Secretary-General of the United Nations Office at Nairobi will commence a consultative process with the Government of Kenya with a view to improving physical security, as well as recommending to heads of United Nations organizations with representation at Nairobi that they relocate their offices to the United Nations compound.

17. With respect to recommendation 5, steps have already been taken for the strengthening of the United Nations Office at Nairobi to provide common administrative services to both UNEP and Habitat. The provision of additional regular budget resources, as well as the possibility of relieving UNEP and Habitat of paying rent, is currently under positive consideration by the Secretary-General, in particular in the context of the 2000–2001 biennial budget.

18. The Secretary-General has already designated the current Executive Director of UNEP as Director-General of the United Nations Office at Nairobi, as well as acting Executive Director of Habitat, thus partially implementing recommendation 6. Further consideration will be given to the full implementation of this recommendation by the Secretary-General.

19. In recommendation 7, the Task Force proposes that UNEP and Habitat derive greater benefit from their common location in terms of administrative efficiency and programmatic synergy. It recommends that UNON be utilized to unify the administrative services of the two organizations; that common support services for information, press and library facilities be established, that the planning and implementation of the two programmes be more tightly linked given their complementarity; and that the possibility of co-locating regional offices be assessed. These recommendations constitute practical measures that can be undertaken in the short term by the Executive Director of UNEP and Habitat to make significant economies and enhance synergy. Action taken will be notified to the UNEP Governing Council and the Commission on Human Settlements, while also indicating the means through which the respective oversight and policy guidance roles of the two governing bodies will be maintained.

20. In view of the urgent need to ensure a sound financial basis for both organizations, proposals for a financial

strategy will also be presented to the governing bodies of the two organizations consistent with recommendation 8.

D. Information, monitoring, assessment and early warning

21. Both organizations carry important responsibilities related to the monitoring and assessment of critical developments in their respective fields of expertise, as well as the responsibility to provide relevant and useful information for decision makers in developing countries. In addition, both must be equipped to notify Governments at an early stage of negative or harmful developments in their respective fields that require either preventive or remedial action to be taken by the international community.

22. The Task Force recognized the central importance of strengthening and focusing the capabilities of the two organizations to play an important role in servicing the information requirements of member countries. In recommendations 9 and 10, a series of measures are proposed to be carried out by the secretariats of the two organizations. The recommendations are consistent with decisions and recommendations made in the respective governing bodies of UNEP and Habitat, as well as by the General Assembly and the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II), and comprise the following complementary measures:

(a) High priority should be given to developing capacity in the field of information, monitoring and assessment and serving as an "environment guardian" in providing the necessary information to enable the sound stewardship of the global environment by the international community;

(b) The Earthwatch system should be reviewed and a determination made of the steps required to transform it into an effective, accessible, well advertised, science-based system capable of meeting the needs of decision makers;

(c) Intensive networking and cooperation should be undertaken with national and international partner institutions to this end;

(d) Problems, action- and result-oriented environment and human settlements indicators for sustainable development should be elaborated;

(e) Capacity should be strengthened and developed to serve as a clearing house for data and information, including information from non-governmental organizations and other grass-roots sources;

(f) A system of information, monitoring and assessment should be designed and maintained so as to maximize its ability to provide early warning of emergencies;

(g) UNEP should consider establishing a capability to identify potential environmental and related conflicts, and to provide information and analysis for the development of preventive measures.

23. All the above recommendations are complementary to existing intergovernmental guidance emanating from the UNEP Governing Council, the Commission on Human Settlements and Habitat II. In the case of UNEP in particular, the Executive Director will be preparing a report for the consideration of the Governing Council of UNEP at its forthcoming session that will elaborate his proposals further in the context of the biennial work programme of UNEP for 2000–2001.

E. Intergovernmental forums

24. The recommendations made by the Task Force in relation to intergovernmental forums have been formulated in direct response to the perception of institutional fragmentation and loss of policy coherence with the growth in the number of separate environment-related intergovernmental processes, and they thus constitute a comprehensive set of measures intended to begin the process of regaining policy coherence in the field of the environment and human settlements.

25. The proposed measures are contained in recommendations 11 to 17 and are primarily directed to intergovernmental bodies. Measures calling for action at the secretariat level are complementary, and would underpin intergovernmental action.

26. In recognition of the importance of integrating regional perspectives into the global agenda, recommendation 12 proposes that UNEP regional offices assist Governments in the regions in defining regional priorities reflecting regional needs and promoting their integration in the global agenda. It also proposes that in the implementation of regional priorities, UNEP involve specialized agencies and other institutions, including financial institutions. These proposed measures are consistent with the evolving role of regional offices of UNEP and the Executive Director will further elaborate on the implementation of this recommendation at the next session of the UNEP Governing Council.

27. With respect to Habitat, recommendation 15 (a) proposes that the Executive Director consider ways to build

the capacity of the Habitat Centre to implement the Habitat Agenda, in particular by strengthening the normative core activities of Habitat and developing it into a well financed centre of excellence. The implementation of this resolution is central to the currently ongoing development of proposals for the reform and restructuring of Habitat being undertaken by the Executive Director. Concrete proposals and report on progress in this respect will be provided to the next session of the Commission on Human Settlements.

28. The Task Force also noted the importance of the effective use of Global Environment Facility (GEF) resources, and proposed in recommendation 17 that collaboration between the three GEF implementing agencies be intensified. This recommendation will be conveyed to the concerned agencies, and will inform the further development of the UNEP/GEF strategy.

F. Involvement of major groups

29. The Task Force recognized the global trends that imply a growing role for elements outside Governments in actions and decisions affecting environment and human settlements, including the activities of the United Nations system. Agenda 21 was of particular importance in this regard. The Task Force reviewed the experience of international processes, and made a series of proposals in recommendations 18 to 23 at both the intergovernmental and secretariat levels with the intention of facilitating a coherent approach to the need to constructively engage non-governmental organizations and civil society in the work of the United Nations.

30. Recommendations 19, 21, 22 and 23 contain the following proposals for action by the secretariat:

(a) UNEP and Habitat should examine ways of constructively engaging business and industry in their work. This is already an ongoing process in both organizations, and will be strengthened within guidelines established by the respective governing bodies;

(b) UNEP and Habitat, with UNDP, should identify and make provision to meet the needs of southern non-governmental organizations for capacity-building, keeping in mind the importance of networking. Inter-agency consultations are proposed on this issue, among others, to develop a cooperative approach;

(c) UNEP and Habitat should establish a specialized unit to provide non-governmental organizations with necessary information, in collaboration with UNDP, and to ensure that the capacities and contributions of non-governmental organizations are utilized. The Executive Director is currently considering modalities for the implementation of this recommendation in the context of the reorganization of Habitat and UNEP;

(d) Non-governmental organizations should improve collaboration amongst themselves to contribute effectively to the work of UNEP and Habitat, and establish focal points for this purpose;

(e) United Nations agencies involved in environment and human settlements should take steps to enable major groups to participate in their activities and meetings. The Secretary-General, through the Executive Director, will bring this recommendation to the attention of the relevant agencies;

(f) UNEP and Habitat should strengthen their systems of receiving and responding to information from non-governmental organizations, especially on emerging problems, and encourage non-governmental organizations to provide information on new problems.

G. Future initiatives

31. The Task Force, in concluding its work, also considered a number of forward-looking proposals designed to project the process initiated by its report more into the future. On recommendation 24, the Task Force made a number of proposals, including:

(a) The Executive Director of UNEP would undertake wide-ranging consultations in preparation for the next session of the UNEP Governing Council;

(b) These consultations would culminate in a two-day "environment forum" immediately before the next session of the Council, and would include wide representation from Governments and the non-governmental sector;

(c) The Commission on Human Settlements would provide forward-looking perspectives as part of this process, which would also contribute to the preparations for the five-year review of the Habitat Agenda in the year 2001.

32. The Executive Director is currently reviewing modalities for how this process of preparation both for the Governing Council and the Commission on Human Settlements may best be organized, and will be consulting Governments through the Committees of Permanent Representatives of UNEP and Habitat on this issue.

IV. Recommendations for action by intergovernmental bodies

33. In addition to the recommendations for action at the level of the respective secretariats of the United Nations, the Task Force recommended a number of actions to be taken by various intergovernmental bodies. Taken together, it was the view of the Task Force that the totality of its report provided a comprehensive approach to commencing the required reform in the area of environment and human settlements. The actions proposed at the intergovernmental level are an essential component of the overall reform package, and are directly related to the major concern of the Task Force in terms of enhancing the policy coherence and coordinated action by the United Nations system in the field of environment and human settlements.

34. The recommendations requiring intergovernmental action are reviewed briefly below, together with an indication of the appropriate intergovernmental body to which the recommendation is addressed. The Secretary-General supports the recommendations of the Task Force, and considers that their implementation will go a long way in enhancing policy coherence and coordination within the United Nations system.

35. Recommendations for action by intergovernmental bodies are made primarily with regard to environmental and environment-related conventions, intergovernmental forums and involvement of major groups, and are outlined below.

A. Linkages among and support to environmental and environment-related conventions

36. In addition to the various recommendations on which action will be taken by the Secretary-General and the Executive Director and that will lead to proposals to be reviewed at the intergovernmental level, the Task Force (recommendation 2 (c)) proposed that the President of the UNEP Governing Council be invited to consult the presidents of the conferences of parties of selected conventions on arrangements for periodic meetings to address cross-cutting issues arising from the various conventions. The Executive Director of UNEP and the heads of the respective convention secretariats would organize and participate in these meetings, the results of which would be brought to the attention of the UNEP Governing Council and respective conferences of parties.

37. The implementation of this recommendation would be consistent with the mandate of UNEP arising from the nineteenth special session of the General Assembly, and would also facilitate the review of progress achieved by the conventions, as indicated in Assembly decision 52/445 of 18 December 1997.

B. Intergovernmental forums

38. Most of the recommendations of the Task Force in this area are intended for action by intergovernmental bodies, and constitute a comprehensive series of measures designed to enhance coherent and coordinated action at the intergovernmental level on environment and human settlements issues throughout the United Nations system.

39. The proposals include general recommendations to Governments, as well as specific measures to be taken by the General Assembly, the UNEP Governing Council, the Commission on Human Settlements and the Committee of Permanent Representatives to UNEP as a formal subsidiary body of the UNEP Governing Council.

40. Recommendation 11 is rooted in the conviction of the Task Force that Governments must provide consistent guidance to the different intergovernmental organizations in the United Nations system, and recommends that Governments make additional efforts to achieve consistency of national positions in different intergovernmental forums. In this regard, an effective environmental management group mechanism would be invaluable in providing coordinated overviews of activities, plans and policy approaches in various issue areas by concerned United Nations agencies. Modalities for making relevant information from the environmental management group available to intergovernmental bodies will be defined as the group is established.

41. Recommendation 13 proposes significant and important institutional adjustments designed to begin to overcome the fragmented approach to intergovernmental policy-making and provide a forum in which high-level debate on global issues is informed by a comprehensive approach to the international environmental agenda.

42. The Task Force (recommendation 13 (a)) proposes that an annual, ministerial-level, global environmental forum be instituted with a number of important functions. It also proposes that regular biennial sessions of the UNEP Governing Council constitute that forum in the years that it meets, and that in alternate years the forum should take the form of a special session of the Governing Council meeting

in different regions of the world and including regional issues on its agenda. The Governing Council of UNEP is a subsidiary body of the General Assembly, and the Secretary-General recommends that action on this proposal be taken by the Assembly at its current session.

43. Recommendation 13 (b) makes a number of very useful recommendations on future agendas of the Governing Council and the structuring and timing of its meetings to enhance coordination with the Commission on Sustainable Development and the conferences of parties of environmental and environment-related conventions. The Executive Director will provide concrete modalities for the consideration of the UNEP Governing Council at its next session for the implementation of these proposals.

44. Recommendation 13 (c) contains an important proposal with significant institutional implications that require the action of the General Assembly at its current session. The Task Force proposes that the membership of the UNEP Governing Council be made universal. The recommendation is made in the context of the increasing importance of global environmental issues that touch on all countries with significant implications for them, and the need for a coordinated policy to those problems and wide participation in those discussions by member countries. This would be consistent with the mandate of UNEP as contained in General Assembly resolution 2997 (XXVII), and would further enhance the coordinating authority of the Council as envisaged by the General Assembly with regard to the development of international environmental policy, which is currently made in a fragmented manner.

45. In recommendation 14, in order to further streamline the functioning of intergovernmental oversight, the Task Force proposes that matters relating to the programme, budget and operations of UNEP and Habitat be reviewed by their respective Committees of Permanent Representatives. In this regard and in the light of the recommendation to establish an annual ministerial forum, the future role of the UNEP High-Level Committee of Ministers and Officials should be considered. The Executive Director will provide a number of options to the Governing Council at its next session in the light of the decisions of the Assembly at its fifty-third session.

46. In support of its recommendation to the Executive Director to build the capacity of Habitat to implement the Habitat Agenda (recommendation 15 (a)) the Task Force proposes in recommendation 15 (b) that the Commission on Human Settlements pay particular attention to its role in monitoring the implementation of the Agenda and take steps to prepare for the review of the Agenda in 2001. The Executive Director will present proposals on these issues to the Commission at its next session, taking into account the outcome of the fifty-third session of the General Assembly. In line with the importance that the Task Force attached to the effective use of GEF resources, it is proposed in recommendation 16 that UNEP's role in providing environmental advocacy, analysis and advice in shaping GEF priorities and programmes be strengthened consistent with UNEP's envisaged role in the GEF instrument and as the lead agency in the United Nations system for environment. Specific proposals in this regard will be presented to the next session of the Governing Council by the Executive Director, and the Council will also be invited to make its recommendations to the GEF Assembly on the strengthened role of UNEP.

C. Involvement of major groups

47. Several recommendations were made by the Task Force on the involvement of major groups that require action at the intergovernmental level, which would be augmented by secretariat actions described above.

48. In recognition of the positive experience of Habitat II at Istanbul, the Task Force proposes that the Commission on Human Settlements consider the establishment of a special status for local authorities. Proposals in this regard will be put before the Commission at its next session by the Executive Director.

49. In recommendation 18 (b), it was also proposed that structured meetings of major groups be organized in conjunction with meetings of the Commission on Human Settlements and the UNEP Governing Council, and that representatives of major groups be accorded the opportunity to formally present their views to these bodies.

50. Recommendation 18 (c) recognizes the valuable experience gained with respect to major groups in the Commission on Sustainable Development process, and proposes that all United Nations agencies encourage participation by major groups, and that the Secretary-General issue general guidelines on these matters. This matter will be considered further in the context of the deliberations of ACC on relations with civil society, including the question of preparation of guidelines.

51. Finally, in recommendation 20 it is recommended that the accreditation process of the Economic and Social Council and other agencies dealing with environment and human settlements be speeded up. This recommendation will be conveyed to the relevant bodies by the Secretary-General.

V. Conclusion

52. It is the view of the Secretary-General that the report of the United Nations Task Force on Environment and Human Settlements constitutes an important step, both in the overall process of United Nations reform and in undertaking the urgent adjustments required in the international system to tackle the pervasive and serious threats to the global environment and decisively move the process of urbanization in a sustainable direction.

53. This is, however, the beginning of a process. The positive consideration of these recommendations by the General Assembly will allow the commencement of a process that can bring substantial gains to the international community in future and allow it to have institutions at its service that are capable of addressing the immense challenges of the future.

Annex

Report of the United Nations Task Force on Environment and Human Settlements

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I. Introduction

1. The Secretary-General, in his report entitled "Renewing the United Nations: a programme for reform" (A/51/950), recognized the need for a more integrated, systemic approach to policies and programmes throughout the whole range of United Nations activities in the economic, social, and development fields. As part of this effort, he informed the General Assembly that he would, in consultation with Governments and the heads of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the United Nations Centre on Human Settlements (Habitat), develop new measures for strengthening and restructuring those two organizations, based on General Assembly resolutions 2997 (XXVII) and 32/162 and taking into account decisions and recommendations of the Governing Council of UNEP and the Commission on Human Settlements. He committed himself to making recommendations to the General Assembly at its fifty-third session, in 1998.

2. To assist him in this respect, in 1998 the Secretary-General constituted a Task Force composed of high-level advisers from Governments, civil society and within the United Nations. The membership of the Task Force is listed in appendix I and its terms of reference in appendix II.

3. The Task Force met four times: on 1 April 1998 at New Delhi; on 26 and 27 April 1998 at New York; on 29 and 30 May 1998 at Bonn; and on 13 to 15 June 1998 at Geneva.

II. Historical background

4. The first major intergovernmental conference on the environment was the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment, held at Stockholm in June 1972. That Conference adopted a farsighted Declaration and Programme of Action and led to the creation of UNEP by the General Assembly with a mandate to catalyse and coordinate environmental actions within the United Nations system. The General Assembly decided that UNEP's headquarters should be located at Nairobi. The UNEP Governing Council became the world's primary environmental forum. The two decades following the Stockholm Conference saw many international actions to protect the environment, including the negotiation of many global and regional conventions.

5. The Stockholm Conference recognized that the built environment deserved special attention, and recommended the holding of a further United Nations conference on this subject. The United Nations Conference on Human Settlements was held at Vancouver from 31 May to 11 June 1976. One of the perceptions that emerged at Vancouver and has since been reinforced is that human settlements are an integral element of development, and should be a high priority at the national level.

6. The Vancouver Conference decided on the Vancouver Declaration and Action Plan, which made national Governments and the international community aware of the plight of human settlements worldwide. It also led to the creation of the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (Habitat), which was established in 1978. In view of the substantial overlap between environmental and human settlements issues, Habitat was located at Nairobi alongside UNEP. Existing United Nations activities and programmes, including the Centre for Housing, Building and Planning established in the mid-1960s and the United Nations Habitat and Human Settlements Foundation established by UNEP, were integrated into Habitat. Habitat was to service a new intergovernmental body, the United Nations Commission on Human Settlements, and carry out an integrated work programme, including research, policy guidance, training, technical cooperation and information. Mechanisms were put in place to encourage cooperation between UNEP and Habitat.

7. Twenty years after Stockholm, the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) was held at Rio de Janeiro in June 1992. UNCED drew even more popular participation and media coverage than the Stockholm Conference, including greater participation by non-governmental organizations and other major groups of society from developing countries. Unlike the Stockholm Conference, UNCED was attended by scores of heads of Government. UNCED approved the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development, Agenda 21 (a compendium of actions needed to achieve sustainable development) and the Non-legally Binding Authoritative Statement of Principles for a Global Consensus on the Management, Conservation and Sustainable Development of All Types of Forests (Forest Principles). It also witnessed the signature of major conventions on climate change and biological diversity.

8. The United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II) was held at Istanbul in June 1996. It adopted the Istanbul Declaration, in which the nations present endorsed the universal goals of ensuring adequate shelter for all and making human settlements safer, healthier and more liveable, equitable, sustainable and productive. The Habitat Agenda that was agreed on at Habitat II is the global plan of action to improve human settlements conditions for the next 20 years. Habitat is charged with coordinating its implementation among United Nations agencies and

facilitating its application by Governments, as well as among other major groups of society.

9. From the time of the Stockholm Conference, it was recognized that environmental issues could not be treated as afterthoughts or dealt with solely by "end-of-the-pipe" approaches, but that environmental considerations must be integrated into the activities of sectoral and development-oriented institutions. Many changes of this kind occurred during the 1970s and 1980s, and the pace of change has accelerated since UNCED and Habitat II. As a result, the international agenda for environment and development has been transformed, and the context in which the United Nations must operate has changed radically. The changes within the United Nations system have been conceptual and organizational; meanwhile, the context has been altered by the emergence or continuation of sweeping global trends.

10. The concept of sustainable development links economic, social, and environmental concerns, and has been adopted by the world community. Agenda 21 assigns a broad range of responsibilities for action to United Nations organizations and bodies, national Governments, and many other international and national groups. Environmental issues have appeared increasingly on the agendas of development-oriented institutions, including UNDP, the World Bank, the regional multilateral development banks and such specialized agencies as the World Health Organization (WHO), the World Meteorological Organization (WMO), the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO), and the regional commissions. The "greening" of these bodies has been a necessary and welcome step, but the integration of environmental considerations in their programmes clearly needs to go further. There has also been a welcome recognition of the need to move in these directions among some sections of business and industry.

11. The United Nations structure was altered after UNCED by the creation of the Commission on Sustainable Development, which provides a high-level forum for environmental, developmental, social and economic issues. The Inter-Agency Committee on Sustainable Development (IACSD), a standing committee of the Administrative Committee on Coordination (ACC), has brought together the United Nations bodies concerned with these issues and has helped to coordinate their work. IACSD's system of designating agencies to be task managers for specific issue areas has decentralized the responsibility for developing coordinated policy positions in key areas of sustainable development, especially as inputs to the Commission on Sustainable Development. The Global Environment Facility (GEF) has been established as a mechanism for financing activities to deal with some global environmental problems.

12. The establishment of the Commission on Sustainable Development, IACSD and GEF has created additional institutional arrangements alongside UNEP in the field of environment and sustainable development, and has highlighted the need to review the role of UNEP and the UNEP Governing Council in this context. The number of international legal instruments concerned with the environment has continued to grow. Demands on ministers and Governments have increased because of the multiplication of high-level meetings, including those of the conferences of parties to international conventions. At the same time, the financial resources available to support international and national actions for sustainable development have fallen far short of what is required, and UNEP's own Environment Fund has declined substantially.

13. Whereas there were institutional changes in the United Nations structure in the field of environment following UNCED, there were no such institutional developments in the field of human settlements following Habitat II. Rather, the Commission on Human Settlements was assigned a central role in monitoring, within the United Nations system, the implementation of the Habitat Agenda; acting as a catalyst to promote adequate shelter for all and sustainable human settlements development; advising the Economic and Social Council on human settlements issues; and assisting the Economic and Social Council in coordinating the implementation of the Habitat Agenda within the United Nations system. Unfortunately, the situation has deteriorated and Habitat has lacked the capacity to carry out these tasks. The absence of any significant institutional change subsequent to the Habitat II Conference has hampered the effective implementation and follow-up of the outcome of that Conference.

14. Human demands on the global life support system continue to mount as poverty and affluence spread in parallel through the globe. Despite all the efforts made since the Stockholm Conference, the environment continues to deteriorate in many parts of the world. Some social, economic and technological trends are exacerbating these problems. In addition, rapid urbanization is outstripping the provision of the services needed for health and welfare. New and unexpected problems will certainly continue to arise. Much more vigorous and effective coordinated action will then be required at all levels. Better monitoring and assessment and enhanced means of providing effective information to Governments will also be crucial.

15. International action will continue to be essential in meeting these challenges. The United Nations system must play a central part in this action, in cooperation with other components of society. Agenda 21 and the global plan of action contained in the Habitat Agenda broke new ground by addressing a broad spectrum of stakeholders who should be involved in the process of developing and implementing policies and actions for environment and human settlements.

III. Needs and responses

16. These developments, trends, and challenges will influence and to a great extent define the role of the United Nations in the field of environment and human settlements. The ways of the past will not suffice in this new era. The Task Force has concluded that the United Nations and its governmental and non-governmental partners will need reformed structures and new methods in order to optimize their effectiveness.

17. The main roles of the United Nations in the field of environment and human settlements are to:

(a) Facilitate intergovernmental consensus and international cooperation on environmental components of policies and actions for sustainable development, including legally binding commitments;

(b) Promote support, especially from developed to developing countries, so as to facilitate the implementation of agreed environmental and human settlements action plans, especially Agenda 21 and the Habitat Agenda;

(c) Involve, encourage, and support relevant stakeholders so that they make their appropriate contribution at the global, regional, national, and local levels;

(d) Monitor and assess existing and emerging environmental problems, alert policy makers and the world public to them, and advocate and coordinate measures and action to tackle these problems and their causes, thereby reducing future risks;

(e) Provide support and resources to enable the effective implementation of global and national commitments relating to the environment and human settlements, and to build capacity for environmental action in developing countries.

18. The remaining sections of the present report consider:

(a) The linkages at the inter-agency level between the United Nations institutions concerned with environment, sustainable development and human settlements, including environmental and environment-related conventions;

(b) Linkages among and support to environmental and environment-related conventions;

(c) The internal needs of the United Nations system, especially those of UNEP and Habitat at Nairobi;

(d) The United Nations role (the Earthwatch function) in collecting, evaluating, and disseminating environmental data and information, including the United Nations responsibility for early and emergency response in the field of environment and human settlements;

(e) The intergovernmental structure of the United Nations in the field of environment and human settlements;

(f) The involvement of civil society and of profit-making enterprises;

(g) The possible role of a reconstituted United Nations Trusteeship Council.

A. Inter-agency linkages

19. The Task Force considers that the United Nations system needs a strong and respected UNEP as its leading environmental organization. For this purpose, UNEP needs to be given adequate financial, staff and information capacities. In particular, it should be the recognized centre of a network of information, monitoring, assessment and early warning, and should play to the full its role as an implementing agency of GEF.

20. The Task Force's review of existing United Nations structures and arrangements in the field of environment and human settlements, linked to different issues and including in-depth examination of the energy and water sectors, has revealed that current United Nations activities are characterized by substantial overlaps, unrecognized linkages and gaps. These flaws are basic and pervasive. They prevent the United Nations system from using its scarce resources to best advantage in addressing problems that are crucial to the human future; harm the credibility and weight of the United Nations in the environmental arena; and damage the United Nations working relationship with its partners in and outside of Government.

21. What is needed is a problem-solving, results-oriented approach that enables United Nations bodies and their partners to share information about their respective plans and activities; to inform and consult one another about proposed new initiatives; to contribute to a planning framework that permits the plans and activities of each participant to be reviewed within the framework of the whole range of activities being carried on by all participants; and to consult

with each other with a view to developing an agreed set of priorities and on the measures through which each participating organization can best contribute to those priorities and achieve a more rational and cost-effective use of their respective capacities and resources.

22. These needs were recognized by the Secretary-General in his report on reform under the heading "Strategy 8: Institute an issue management system" (see A/51/950, paras. 248-250).

Recommendation 1

The Task Force recommends that in order to meet these needs with respect to the environment and human settlements, the Secretary-General should establish an environmental management group. It would replace the existing Inter-Agency Environment Coordination Group, which should be abolished

23. The environmental management group would be chaired by the Executive Director of UNEP, supported by a secretariat. The Chair would report to the Secretary-General. The group would include as core members the main United Nations entities concerned with environment and human settlements. Particular meetings would involve additional United Nations entities, financial institutions, and organizations outside the United Nations system that have experience and expertise relevant to the issues on the agenda.

24. The environmental management group would be concerned with environment and human settlement issues in the context of the linkages between environment and development, as defined at UNCED and subsequently elaborated. Habitat should be a prominent participant in the group, which should structure its operations so as to achieve an integrated United Nations work programme that bridges the gaps that have existed between the two areas.

25. The most important goal of the environmental management group should be to achieve effective coordination and joint action in key areas of environmental and human settlements concern. Another important objective should be to assist intergovernmental bodies in the area of environment and human settlements, in particular the UNEP Governing Council and the commission on Human Settlements, in the preparation of coordinated inputs to intergovernmental forums, notably the Commission on Sustainable Development. The group should report on an informational basis to ACC, and should bring an environmental perspective into the work of IACSD. The group should establish time-bound task forces or working groups covering clusters of issues in which representatives of the main institutions involved in a particular issue can work together quickly to solve important problems (for example, the recently reconstituted Ecosystem Conservation Group).

26. The environmental management group should include convention secretariats among its participants, when needed. In addition to facilitating the kinds of linkages among conventions that are recommended in section III.B below, the group should act to ensure that there are appropriate linkages among activities that occur under conventions and relevant activities elsewhere in the international system.

27. The Task Force considered the question whether the environmental management group should produce a single United Nations environmental programme, similar to the former system-wide, medium-term environment programme. The Task Force concluded that in view of fast-moving global trends, a static programme, no matter how frequently it is updated, is bound to lag behind real needs. Instead, the group should create a dynamic process for review of planned activities and modification of goals and activities in the light of new knowledge. However, subgroups of the environmental management group may agree on sharply focused action plans as a means of coordinating actions at the programme level and allocating resources in the most effective manner.

28. Regional action and regional coordination are essential in the field of environment and human settlements. At the level of field operations, the existing system of United Nations resident coordinators is responsible for effective coordination of activities related to environment and human settlements, and should be strengthened. The environmental management group should from time to time review the effectiveness of this coordination.

B. Linkages among and support to environmental and environment-related conventions

29. The creation of a large number of legally binding instruments in areas of environmental concern has been a major success of the international community. However, as a result of decisions by Governments, the secretariats of environmental and environment-related conventions have been located in diverse geographic locations, with little regard to the functional relationships among conventions. That dispersal has resulted in loss of efficiency because of

inability to take advantage of synergies among conventions and substantial costs through loss of economies of scale and fragmentation of administrative, conference and infrastructure services. The period after UNCED led to a significant increase in activities related to environmental and environment-related conventions, and the number of international meetings of relevant treaty bodies has increased significantly. This has created additional burdens, especially for ministers.

30. Bearing in mind that the main policy decisions under conventions are taken by their respective conferences of parties, which are autonomous bodies, strengthening of the linkages between conventions with a view to achieving synergies and multiple benefits and promoting coherence of policies and actions should be a long-term strategic goal of the international community. Intergovernmental bodies, including the General Assembly in paragraphs 119 and 123 of the Programme for the Further Implementation of Agenda 21 (see General Assembly resolution S/19-2 of 28 June 1997, annex), have identified the need for more effective linkages and support. Decisions of the General Assembly at its nineteenth special session, in 1997, and prior decisions by the General Assembly and the UNEP Governing Council have provided a clear basis for UNEP to foster such linkages. Pursuant to these mandates, UNEP has sponsored annual meetings of the secretariats of selected environmental conventions, which have addressed common issues, such as implementation at the national level, including development of relevant national legislation and institutions, capacity-building and technical assistance.

31. Further steps are needed to strengthen linkages and provide support that will ensure that the international community derives maximum benefit from the investments it has made in this system of international instruments.

Recommendation 2

The Task Force recommends that, in addition to integrating convention secretariats and convention-related issues in the work of the environmental management group, the following actions should be taken by UNEP in pursuance of the above-mentioned mandate from the General Assembly at its nineteenth special session:

(a) UNEP's substantive support to global and regional conventions should be founded on its capacities for information, monitoring and assessment, which need to be strengthened substantially and urgently for this purpose. UNEP should build its capacity and its networks of support in order to ensure the scientific underpinning of conventions, to respond to their requests for specialized analysis and technological assessments, and to facilitate their implementation;

(b) The Executive Director of UNEP should continue to sponsor joint meetings of heads of secretariats of global and regional conventions, and should use this forum to recommend actions to ensure that the work programmes established by the conferences of parties to the conventions, together with substantive support offered by UNEP, are complementary, fill gaps and take advantage of synergy, and avoid overlap and duplication. These meetings also should explore ways of fulfilling common substantive and administrative needs. Recommendations from these meetings should be presented to the conferences of parties by the respective secretariats;

(c) The Governing Council of UNEP should invite its President to consult the presidents of conferences of parties to selected conventions on arrangements for periodic meetings between representatives of those conventions in order to address cross-cutting issues arising from the work programmes of these bodies and policy approaches being followed by them. The Executive Director of UNEP and the heads of the respective convention secretariats would organize and participate in these meetings. The conclusions of these meetings would be brought to the attention of UNEP's Governing Council and the respective conferences of parties by the respective secretariats;

(d) Concerned about the operational inefficiencies and costs arising from the geographical dispersal of convention secretariats, the Task Force recommends that the Secretary-General, through the Executive Director of UNEP, invite Governments and Conferences of Parties to consider the implications of this trend and ways to overcome the resulting problems. Every effort should be made to co-locate new conventions with other conventions in the same functional cluster (for example, biological resources, chemicals/waste, marine pollution) and with institutions with which they have a particular affinity. With respect to existing conventions, approaches should include promoting cooperation among the secretariats within each cluster with a view to their eventual co-location and possible fusion into a single secretariat, and, in the longer term, should include

the negotiation of umbrella conventions covering each cluster

C. UNEP, Habitat and the United Nations at Nairobi

32. It was recognized at the time of the Stockholm Conference that environment and human settlements issues are closely related. In consequence, the Vancouver Conference decided to locate Habitat alongside UNEP at Nairobi. Subsequent events have strengthened this relationship, and the worldwide trend towards urbanization seems certain to forge even closer links. Yet cooperation between UNEP and Habitat is still limited.

33. The Task Force discussed the Nairobi location of the United Nations, and agreed that there is an urgent need to strengthen it. Nairobi is the only location of a major United Nations office in the developing world (the other major offices, in addition to United Nations Headquarters in New York, are the United Nations Offices at Geneva and Vienna). The United Nations Office at Nairobi should have arrangements in keeping with its status. There are several requirements for achieving this goal in addition to the already mentioned need for closer coordination between UNEP and Habitat. They include better communications capabilities, improved physical security, an enhanced United Nations presence at Nairobi and adequate access to the regular budget of the United Nations with respect to administrative costs. The Task Force:

(a) Commends the Government of Kenya for the efforts already taken to improve communication between the Nairobi location and the rest of the world, but urges the Executive Director to work together with the Government to enhance and strengthen communications capabilities by allowing unrestricted access to the Mercure satellite at a reasonable cost;

(b) Is aware of the socio-economic problems of the region and the difficulty of ensuring physical security for United Nations staff and related personnel, yet recognizes that lack of security makes it difficult for UNEP and Habitat to attract and retain the highly qualified staff that they must have to succeed in their missions;

Recommendation 3

The Task Force recommends that the Secretary-General, through the Director General of the United Nations Office at Nairobi, request the Government of Kenya to address further the problem of physical security

Recommendation 4

The Task Force recommends that other United Nations agencies, funds, and programmes be stimulated to establish or expand activities at Nairobi so as to transform the United Nations compound at Nairobi into a fully active United Nations Office

(c) Notes that UNEP and Habitat are the only United Nations entities with global responsibilities that have their headquarters in a developing country, reflecting the commitment of the international community to strengthen capacity in developing nations to address the issues of environment and human settlements. Currently, these organizations conduct their work under difficult financial conditions;

Recommendation 5

The Task Force recommends that the United Nations Office at Nairobi, which provides common services to UNEP and Habitat, be strengthened and be provided, as an exceptional measure, with sufficient resources from the regular budget to fulfil its tasks, and that the United Nations consider the possibility of relieving UNEP and Habitat from paying rent

(d) Believes that the Secretary-General acted wisely when he designated one individual to head UNEP, Habitat and the United Nations Office at Nairobi;

Recommendation 6

The Task Force recommends that UNEP, Habitat and the United Nations Office at Nairobi continue in the future to be directed by one person

(e) Sees the measures suggested above as important ingredients in a process that would enhance confidence in UNEP and Habitat, facilitating the attainment of a broader, more stable and predictable financial basis for the two organizations.

34. There are a number of ways in which UNEP and Habitat can benefit from their co-location. Among them are common administrative functions, common support institutions, common programme activities and the possibility of co-located regional offices.

Recommendation 7

The Task Force recommends that the Executive Director of UNEP and Executive Director of Habitat:

(a) Utilize the United Nations Office at Nairobi to unify the administration of the two organizations to the fullest extent feasible;

(b) Make full use of the synergistic co-location of the two organizations by establishing common institutions for:

(i) Information and databases and the clearing house function;

(ii) Press and information services;

(iii) Library and other forms of support;

(c) Ensure that the planning and implementation of the programmes of the two organizations are tightly linked through monitoring, assessment, and information and joint working parties on such overlapping issues as environmental health and the sustainability of cities. This should in no way compromise the distinctive nature of UNEP and Habitat but should be complementary;

(d) Assess the possibility of co-locating the regional offices of the two organizations

35. The Task Force is concerned that UNEP and Habitat must have adequate human and financial resources if they are to fulfil the mandates of the Nairobi Declaration and decisions of the Governing Council and the General Assembly. Accordingly, the Task Force agrees with and underlines the decision made at the May 1998 special session of the UNEP Governing Council that there is an urgent need for stable and predictable funding.

Recommendation 8

The Task Force recommends that the Executive Director of UNEP and Executive Director of Habitat develop a financial strategy, in close cooperation with the Committee of Permanent Representatives at Nairobi, and report on it at the next meetings of the UNEP Governing Council and the Commission on Human Settlements. The financial strategy should address such matters as policies concerning secondment, including geographical balance; conditions for accepting in-kind contributions; the role of counterpart contributions in implementing the programmes of UNEP and Habitat; and the possibility of obtaining funds from foundations and other private sources

D. Information, monitoring, assessment and early warning

36. Pursuant to the action plan that was adopted at the Stockholm Conference, UNEP developed during the 1970s the Earthwatch system for assessing the condition of the global environment. Chapters 38 and 40 of Agenda 21 called on UNEP to strengthen Earthwatch, especially in the areas of urban air, freshwater, land resources (including forests and rangelands), desertification, other habitats, soil degradation, biodiversity, the high seas and the upper atmosphere, and to make the resulting information more available for decision-making.

37. UNEP was named as task manager for Earthwatch by IACSD. The mission of Earthwatch, as agreed in 1994 by the inter-agency Earthwatch Working Party, is to coordinate, harmonize and integrate observing, assessment and reporting activities across the United Nations system in order to provide environmental and appropriate socio-economic information for national and international decision-making on sustainable development, and for early warning of emerging problems requiring international actions. This should include timely information on the pressures on, status of and trends in key global resources, variables and processes in both natural and human systems, and on the response to problems in these areas.

38. The Earthwatch system seeks to fulfil this mandate by integrating data and analyses from a variety of scientifically proven sources. These include, among others, the Global Environmental Monitoring System (GEMS), the Global Resource Information Database (GRID), and three Global Observing Systems (the Global Climate Observing System, the Global Oceans Observing System and the Global Terrestrial Observing System). Earthwatch uses up-to-date communications technologies to maintain an excellent site on the World Wide Web. However, the Earthwatch system and its capabilities are largely unknown to the large universe of decision makers and environmentally concerned members of the public who could benefit from it. Moreover, there are gaps and deficiencies in the underlying systems of data collection and analysis, and in the methods by which data and analysis are translated into information that is understandable to non-experts. UNEP's depleted staff in the area of monitoring and assessment lacks the ability to identify and correct these flaws.

39. Human settlement conditions are monitored and assessed by Habitat, which also collects, collates and publishes statistics on human settlements conditions and trends. A new monitoring and assessment framework for the implementation of the Habitat Agenda will involve inputs from partners in Government and other elements of society.

Recommendation 9

The Task Force recommends that UNEP and Habitat:

(a) As a matter of high priority, develop their capacity in the field of information-monitoring and assessment in order to serve as an "environmental guardian," mobilizing the necessary resources from Governments, foundations, and international bodies;

(b) Carry out a short-term review to determine the steps needed to transform Earthwatch into an effective, accessible, well-advertised, science-based system that meets the needs of environmental and human settlements decision makers and the informed public, and employs expert analysis and user feedback to correct deficiencies and update itself to meet changing needs;

(c) Take the actions, in intensive networking cooperation with national and international partner institutions, including non-governmental organizations and other major groups, that are needed to transform Earthwatch and sustain it as a fully effective system of information, monitoring and assessment;

(d) Continue to elaborate problem-, action-, and result-oriented indicators for sustainable development in the field of environment and human settlements;

(e) Strengthen and further develop their capacity to serve as a clearing house for collecting and disseminating information and data relevant to the condition of the environment and human settlements, including information from and to non-governmental organizations and other grass-roots sources.

40. The Earthwatch system should be designed, *inter alia*, to alert the world to emerging environmental problems and threats. Information about such problems should be communicated in understandable terms to relevant decision makers, the media and the informed public. Earthwatch also can contribute importantly to such syntheses as UNEP's *GEO* series and Habitat's periodic *Global Report on Human Settlements*.

41. Monitoring and assessment are closely linked to early warning of possible environmental emergencies through the prediction of extreme events or unusual environmental conditions. This kind of warning is extremely valuable for environmental and economic decision makers; for example, advance warning of drought conditions can enable farmers to plant drought-resistant crops. It may be possible to identify, on a long-term basis, potential "hot spots" or areas that are likely to be subject to rates of change that exceed the limits of sustainability and thus pose threats to regional or global security.

Recommendation 10

The Task Force recommends that UNEP and Habitat design and maintain the system of information, monitoring and assessment so as to maximize its ability to provide early warning of possible environmental and human settlements emergencies. It further recommends that UNEP consider establishing a capability to identify potential environmental and environment-related conflicts and provide information and analysis to guide the development of preventive measures, for example by the negotiation of joint actions

E. Intergovernmental forums

42. The United Nations is an intergovernmental organization. Organs and agencies of the United Nations can perform their functions efficiently only if they receive clear guidance from Member States. This is true in the field of environment and human settlements, as in all others. There is a need for intergovernmental forums to give that guidance.

43. There is a lack of coherent guidance at this level. Specialized agencies, for example, are responsible only to their governing bodies. In the environmental field, some specialized agencies have sectoral missions that correspond to specific elements within national Governments; hence, the agendas of those agencies may reflect very different priorities.

44. The only entities that can give consistent guidance to these different bodies are national Governments. In view of the important role that is played in the field of environment and human settlements by international institutions not under the authority of the Secretary-General, coordination cannot

be fully effective unless Governments themselves give coordinated guidance. In short, coordination at the international level should begin at home.

Recommendation 11

The Task Force recommends that Governments make additional efforts to achieve consistency of national positions in different intergovernmental forums. The environmental management group should assist Governments in achieving such coherence by providing coordinated overviews of activities, plans and policy approaches in the United Nations system as a whole

Recommendation 12

The Task Force recommends that UNEP regional offices assist Governments in each region in their discussion of the global agenda, in defining priorities reflecting the particular needs of each region, and in promoting those regional priorities in the global agenda. In the implementation of regional priorities, UNEP should involve specialized agencies and other institutions concerned with environment and human settlements, as well as those that can provide financing

45. Current intergovernmental forums are inadequate to give the kind of guidance that is needed in the environmental field. Those forums, consisting primarily of the UNEP Governing Council, the Commission on Sustainable Development, and meetings of the conferences of parties of leading conventions, are scattered as to time and place. They are attended by different constellations of ministers. They differ in their outcomes: some are decision-making bodies, whereas others serve primarily as forums for policy debates, consensus-building, review of United Nations activities and plans, and exchanges with major groups. Ministers have expressed dissatisfaction because attendance at so many meetings is time-consuming for them. Moreover, the scattering of different meetings on different subjects makes it hard for participants to get the "big picture" perspective that is important for setting global priorities.

46. In addition, the traditional United Nations format for intergovernmental meetings does not fully meet the need for high-level consideration of environmental issues. The traditional United Nations format has featured formal discussion leading to agreement on the exact wording of a text. That format is ill-suited to many of the purposes that intergovernmental meetings on environment and human settlements should fulfil. Those purposes require a format that allows for actual debate and fewer statements, more in-depth discussions, more interaction with major groups and structured efforts to produce innovative strategies that can meet tomorrow's challenges.

47. The Task Force affirms that the Commission on Sustainable Development and the Governing Council of UNEP have necessary and distinctive roles. The Commission on Sustainable Development provides a forum for high-level debate, including ministerial debate, that bridges and relates environmental, developmental, and socio-economic elements. The UNEP Governing Council is and should remain the primary forum within which Ministers and senior officials of Governments can review the environmental performance of the United Nations system as a whole and define priorities for new action.

Recommendation 13

The Task Force recommends:

(a) That there be an established annual, ministerial-level, global environmental forum in which environment ministers can gather to review and revise the environmental agenda of the United Nations in the context of sustainable development; oversee and evaluate the implementation of that agenda; discuss key issues in depth; identify challenges requiring international environmental cooperation and develop plans of action for meeting them; review the role of UNEP in relation to GEF; and engage in a variety of discussions with their peers, with representatives of international institutions and with major groups. In the years when it meets, the UNEP Governing Council should be that intergovernmental forum. In alternate years, the forum should be a special session of the UNEP Governing Council, which would focus on issues of high priority. The venue of these special sessions should move from region to region, and regional issues should feature prominently on their agenda;

(b) That the agenda of each session of the Governing Council be a lively one, designed to foster debates on topical issues and to attract media attention. Each session should cover topics of global importance, and in the case of meetings held in the regions, should cover issues of special significance to the region where the meeting is held. Each session should be structured so as to provide input to that year's Commission on Sustainable

Development meetings. A major item on the agenda of each session should be to review, from a cross-cutting perspective, progress made under the various environmental conventions;

(c) That the membership of the UNEP Governing Council be made universal. This recommendation would not apply for the Commission on Human Settlements because it is a subsidiary body of ECOSOC

48. The regular and special sessions of the Governing Council should receive reports from the Executive Director of UNEP on the work of the environmental management group in promoting linkages among components of the United Nations system. The joint meetings of representatives of the conferences of parties of selected conventions that was recommended previously might be held "back to back" with sessions of the Governing Council.

49. There is a need for stronger links between environmental and human settlements at the intergovernmental as well as the inter-agency levels. It would not be appropriate to merge the UNEP Governing Council with the Commission on Human Settlements, because those bodies have distinctive characters and partially different substantive agendas, and because they typically involve two distinct sets of ministers, those responsible for the environment and those responsible for housing, and it is unlikely that many Governments would send two ministers to the same meeting. However, the agendas of the two bodies should be cross-linked and designed to complement one another. Environmental matters should be standing items on the agenda of the Commission on Human Settlements, and human settlements-related issues should occupy a similar place on the agenda of the Governing Council. To the extent feasible, the Nairobi meetings of the two bodies should overlap.

Recommendation 14

The Task Force recommends that continuing international liaison on matters relating to the programme, budget and operations of UNEP and Habitat be undertaken at Nairobi by the Committees of Permanent Representatives and High-Level Officials convened by the Executive Director on behalf of their Chairmen. In the light of the changes recommended in the present report, the Governing Council of UNEP should consider the future role of the High-Level Committee of Ministers and Officials

50. The special identity and distinctive character of Habitat should be retained, bearing in mind its mandate in General Assembly resolution 32/162 of 19 December 1977, as clarified and developed in the Habitat Agenda. A particularly important consideration for the Task Force is that Habitat has been designated as a focal point for the implementation of the Habitat Agenda, and that the Commission on Human Settlements has a central role in monitoring its implementation.

51. Habitat has a large, demand-driven technical cooperation programme with a clear development agenda. The financial support for that programme comes solely from earmarked sources. The financial basis of Habitat has been seriously eroded in recent years, particularly in regard to core funds, which are crucial for its normative activities. If Habitat is to fulfil its role in promoting the implementation of Habitat Agenda, it is imperative that its normative functions be strengthened substantially. This will require a stronger financial base, especially with regard to core funding. In addition, existing overlaps between the technical cooperation programmes and the activities of other parts of Habitat should be eliminated.

Recommendation 15

The Task Force recommends:

(a) That the Executive Director of Habitat consider ways of building capacity to facilitate the implementation of the Habitat Agenda, particularly by strengthening the normative core activities of Habitat and developing it into a centre of excellence for urban development, and ways to obtain the necessary financial resources;

(b) That the Commission on Human Settlements devote particular attention to its role in monitoring the implementation of the Habitat Agenda, and take steps to prepare for the five-year review of the implementation of the Habitat Agenda, which will occur in 2001

52. The Task Force attaches the greatest significance to the effective use of GEF resources.

Recommendation 16

The Task Force recommends that, consistent with the GEF instrument, UNEP's role in providing environmental advocacy, analysis and advice in shaping GEF priorities and programmes should be strengthened, building on UNEP's current responsibility for ensuring the scientific

underpinning of GEF activities. UNEP should act as catalyst and advocate for new directions, and should take the lead among the three GEF implementing agencies in providing environmental advice. This role is consistent with UNEP's status as the lead agency in the United Nations system for identifying large-scale environmental threats and proposing remedial measures

Recommendation 17

The Task Force recommends that there be increased collaboration among the three GEF implementing agencies, in accordance with relevant GEF decisions

F. Involvement of major groups

53. Global trends imply a growing role for elements outside government in actions and decisions affecting the environment and human settlements, including activities and decisions of the United Nations system. Agenda 21 recognized this reality in its description in chapters 24 to 32 of the roles of "major groups,"including women, youth, indigenous people, non-governmental organizations, local authorities, trade unions, business and industry, the scientific and technological community, and farmers. Governments and international bodies need the wisdom, experience, knowledge and resources of these groups if they are going to make environmental and human settlements decisions, in the context of sustainable development, that are scientifically based, economically sound, suited to local conditions and in accord with the desires of ordinary people.

54. The Stockholm Conference on the Human Environment and the accompanying Non-Governmental Organization Forum marked a breakthrough in the way that major groups related to and sought to influence an intergovernmental decision-making process. UNCED was another watershed event, attended by representatives of some 8,000 non-governmental organizations from more than 160 countries. The Habitat II Conference in 1996 was attended by some 20,000 people and representatives of more than 500 local authorities. It featured the following innovative mechanisms for involving major groups from the beginning of the preparatory process:

(a) All Governments were invited to create national Habitat II committees involving a wide spectrum of society;

(b) The drafting group that prepared the Habitat Agenda included representatives of local authorities and non-governmental organizations;

(c) The Conference itself featured a "partners' committee" (Committee II), in which representatives of civil society were officially invited to assemble in their own forum and present their views to the representatives of Governments;

(d) United Nations officials joined with representatives of civil society in making possible a set of "Dialogues for the twenty-first century,"which explored in details key issues concerning the future of cities, including water and energy;

(e) Statements produced in the dialogue sessions, together with the Chairperson's summaries of the discussions in Committee II, were included in the official record of Habitat II.

55. The Commission on Sustainable Development also has been a leader in its relations with major groups. Commission on Sustainable Development meetings are attended by representatives of a wide variety of interests. Non-governmental organization participation is facilitated by a broad-based Non-Governmental Organization Steering Committee. New participants are welcomed, and the Commission on Sustainable Development secretariat prepares guidelines on a regular basis to help them participate and contribute. The practice at Commission on Sustainable Development meetings has been that representatives of major groups are allowed to speak virtually on an equal basis with representatives of Governments. The sixth session of the Commission on Sustainable Development, in 1998 featured an innovative industry segment that included participants from various major groups. Additional "economic sector" segments are planned for future Commission on Sustainable Development meetings.

56. The extensive involvement of major groups at Habitat II and in the work of the Commission on Sustainable Development has enlivened and enriched deliberations that are important to the world's future. Further steps are needed to ensure that this kind of involvement is the rule in the United Nations. They should begin with the Commission on Human Settlements and the UNEP Governing Council.

Recommendation 18

The Task Force recommends:

(a) That the Commission on Human Settlements consider establishing a special status for representatives of local authorities;

(b) That future sessions of the UNEP Governing Council and of the Commission on Human Settlements be preceded by or overlap with substantial, structured meetings of major groups, covering the same substantive agenda topics that are to be covered at the intergovernmental meetings. Representatives of the major groups should be given an opportunity to discuss the findings of these meetings in a round-table meeting with ministers, and should report this to the Governing Council and the Commission, which should record their responses;

(c) The practices of the Governing Council and the Commission on Human Settlements should be reformed, as an initial step, to come up to the standard of the Commission on Sustainable Development with respect to the involvement of major groups, and the Governing Council and Commission secretariats should take steps (for example, the preparation of guidelines) to facilitate their participation. All other United Nations agencies involved with environment and human settlements should re-examine their rules and practices with the aim of encouraging and facilitating participation by major groups to the fullest extent practicable, consistent with the principle that the final decisions must rest with representatives of Governments. The Task Force further recommends that the Secretary-General issue general guideliaes on these matters, and urges all United Nations agencies to conform with them

57. It is apparent, in view of global trends and the need for cleaner methods of production, that environment and human settlements policy must be more integrated with economic decision making. This means that there must be a well balanced and effective continuing dialogue with business, industry, and other economic interests.

Recommendation 19

The Task Force recommends that UNEP and Habitat examine, together with representatives of business, industry and other economic interests, ways of involving that community constructively in their deliberations

58. Non-governmental organizations commonly must obtain consultative status with the Economic and Social Council in order to gain access to intergovernmental meetings and other United Nations processes. Consultative status is not often denied; however, it currently takes about a year to obtain accreditation.

Recommendation 20

The Task Force recommends that the Economic and Social Council accreditation process, and those of other United Nations entities concerned with environment and human settlements, be speeded up to the fullest extent possible

59. Non-governmental organizations from developing countries commonly have fewer resources and less capacity than those from industrialized nations. UNEP and Habitat should take actions to help them build their capacity for constructive participation.

Recommendation 21

The Task Force recommends:

(a) That UNEP, Habitat and UNDP systematically identify, in consultation with non-governmental organizations and non-governmental organization leaders, the needs of southern non-governmental organizations for capacity- building, and act to meet those needs, both directly and by mobilizing funds from other donors. In so doing, they should keep in mind the importance of networking among non-governmental organizations, especially via electronic communications, and should help southern non-governmental organizations to build their capacity in that area;

(b) That UNEP and Habitat establish a specialized unit to provide concerned non-governmental organizations with necessary and updated information, and together with UNDP, assist them technically and financially to carry out their work effectively at national, regional and global levels. They should also establish mechanisms to ensure that the expertise and contributions of non-governmental organizations can be utilized by UNEP and Habitat;

(c) That non-governmental organizations be encouraged to strengthen their capacities to contribute effectively to the activities of UNEP and Habitat, including improving collaboration and networking among themselves and establishing focal points to liaise with UNEP and Habitat at global and regional levels

60. Major groups from developing countries often find it difficult to attend international negotiations and meetings even when they have a right to do so, because of lack of funds for travel and subsistence.

Recommendation 22

The Task Force recommends that to the fullest extent possible, the United Nations agencies involved in environment and human settlements take steps to enable major groups from these countries to participate meaningfully in their activities, both through capacity- building to make possible meaningful participation in negotiations and meetings, and through establishment of funds to which Governments and others are encouraged to contribute

Recommendation 23

The Task Force recommends that UNEP and Habitat strengthen their system for receiving and responding to information from non-governmental organizations on environmental and human settlements problems, especially emerging problems. In this regard, UNEP and Habitat should encourage non-governmental organizations to provide information on new problems that might arise, for example, from the introduction of new technologies or new production activities or changes in economic or social policies

G. Possible role of a reconstituted United Nations Trusteeship Council

61. In paragraphs 84 and 85 of his report on United Nations reform (A/51/950), the Secretary-General recommended to the international community a new concept of trusteeship, and proposed that the United Nations Trusteeship Council be reconstituted as the forum through which Member States exercise their collective trusteeship for the integrity of the global environment and common areas, such as the oceans, atmosphere and outer space, as well as linking the United Nations and civil society in addressing these areas of global concern. In a subsequent note to the General Assembly (A/52/849), the Secretary-General recalled this proposal and noted that it has become increasingly evident that issues relating to the integrity of the global environment and common areas have a direct bearing on the future of mankind, and that those issues need to be understood and addressed in a strategic and long-term perspective. The Secretary-General also suggested that the Task Force should elaborate further on his proposals.

62. In reviewing the proposals of the Secretary-General, the Task Force was cognizant of the note of the Secretary-General to the General Assembly (A/52/850) concerning a Millennium Assembly and Millennium Forum. That note proposed that the fifty-fifth session of the General Assembly be designated as the "Millennium Assembly" and include a high-level segment to be called the "Millennium Summit". The Summit would be asked to provide guidance to the United Nations for meeting the challenges of the new century, including such matters as the nature and fundamental goals of the United Nations and the way it should relate to and interact with the growing number of international institutions, an increasingly robust global civil society, and ever more integrated global markets and systems of production. The Secretary-General's note also proposed that non-governmental organizations and other civil society actors organize a Millennium Forum to be held in conjunction with the Assembly.

63. In the same note to the General Assembly, the Secretary-General announced that in order to facilitate focused discussions and concrete decisions, he would prepare a report on the theme of the Millennium Assembly, entitled "The United Nations in the twenty-first century." The report would draw on a series of informal events involving Member States and other actors to be held in regional centres around the world; on events of a more specialized nature in the United Nations; and on the results of consultations currently taking place within ACC.

64. The Task Force also recalled the decision of the UNEP Governing Council at its recent fifth special session on the revitalization, reform and strengthening of UNEP. In that decision, the Governing Council, *inter alia*, decided to review at its next regular session the status of the ongoing reform of UNEP and to provide the Millennium Assembly with its conclusions concerning institutional arrangements within the United Nations system for dealing with the environmental challenges of the next century and the role of UNEP in that context. The Task Force believes that these conclusions will provide an important environmental

perspective for the Millennium Assembly and will enhance the preparatory process.

Recommendation 24

The Task Force recommends:

(a) That the Executive Director of UNEP, in preparing for the next regular session of the UNEP Governing Council, undertake wide-ranging consultations concerning institutional arrangements for dealing with the environmental challenges of the next century;

(b) That these consultations include Government representatives, non-governmental organizations, and other representatives of civil society and the private sector, and culminate in a two-day environment forum to be held immediately before and in conjunction with the next session of the Governing Council. The forum should suggest to both the Governing Council and the Millennium Assembly and Forum forward-looking proposals for the protection of the global environment, including the possible future role of the Trusteeship Council;

(c) That the Commission on Human Settlements provide forward-looking perspectives on human settlements issues as part of this process. These perspectives would also contribute to the preparations for the five-year review of the Habitat Agenda to be undertaken in 2001

Appendix I

Membership of the Task Force

Task Force members

Klaus **Toepfer** (Chair)
Executive Director
United Nations Environment Programme

Maria Julia **Alsogaray**, Minister of Natural Resources and Sustainable Development of Argentina

Christina **Amoako-Nuama**, Minister of Education of Ghana

John **Ashe**, Ambassador/Deputy Permanent Representative of Antigua and Barbuda to the United Nations

Julia **Carabias Lillo**, Minister of Natural Resources and Fisheries of Mexico

Nitin **Desai**, Under-Secretary-General, Department for Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat

Lars-Goran **Engfeldt**, Permanent Representative of Sweden to UNEP and Habitat

Guro **Fjellanger**, Minister of Environment of Norway

Jean-Pierre **Halbwachs**, Assistant Secretary-General/Controller, United Nations Office of Programme Planning, Budget and Accounts

Sir Martin **Holdgate**, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland

Martin **Khor**, Director, Third World Network, Malaysia

Ashok **Khosla**, Development alternatives, India

Tommy **Koh**, Ambassador-At-Large, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Singapore

Julia Marton **LeFevre**, LEAD International, Inc., New York

James Gustave **Speth**, Administrator, United Nations Development Programme

Maurice **Strong** (ex officio), Special Adviser to the Secretary-General

Mostafa K. **Tolba**, President, International Centre for Environment and Development, Cairo

Joseph **Tomusange**, High Commissioner of the Republic of Uganda to India

Makarim **Wibisono**, Permanent Representative of Indonesia to the United Nations

Timothy E. **Wirth**, President, United Nations Foundation

Michael **Zammit Cutajar**, Executive Secretary, Secretariat of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change

Advisers to the Task Force

Eileen Claussen

Peter Thacher

Secretariat to the Task Force

Per **Bakken**

Donald **Kaniaru**

Donatus **Okpala**

Lesly **Puyol**

Thomas **Stoel**

Appendix II

Terms of reference of the Task Force

The terms of reference of the United Nations Task Force on Environment and Human Settlements are:

(a) To review existing structures and arrangements through which environment and environment-related activities are carried out within the United Nations, with particular reference to departments, funds and programmes that report to the Secretary-General but also taking into account the relevant programmes and activities of the specialized agencies;

(b) In this respect, to focus particularly on the distinctive functions of policy, development of norms and standards, programme development and implementation, and financing, as well as relationships among those functions;

(c) To evaluate the efficacy and effectiveness of existing structures and arrangements, and make recommendations for such changes and improvements as will optimize the work and effectiveness of United Nations environmental work at the global level and of UNEP as the leading environmental organization or "authority", as well as the role of UNEP as the principal source of environmental input into the work of the Commission on Sustainable Development;

(d) To prepare proposals for consideration by the Secretary-General and subsequent submission to the General Assembly on reforming and strengthening United Nations activities in the area of environment and human settlements.